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INFO RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0174
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 1949
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0090
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0385
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 0846
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 0081
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 0862
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0269
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PESHAWAR 000094

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADER ON DEMOCRACY

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CLASSIFIED BY: Michael Spangler, Principal Officer, Amconsul
Peshawar, State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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SUMMARY

1. (C) National Assembly Opposition Leader Maulana Fazlur Rahman recently told us he supports giving the GOP a list of names for the permanent head of the Federal Election Commission (FEC) -- but only if (1) the GOP publicly solicits nominations from all political parties and (2) the GOP including the Pakistan Army publicly agrees to respect the FEC's independence.

2. (C) Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) Chief Minister Akram Durrani also warned time is running out for the institution of transparent, election procedures before national and provincial assembly races in 2007. The GOP could demonstrate its commitment to genuine reform by issuing a federal ordinance calling for a show of hands for upcoming senate elections on March 6. The existing secret ballot system is setting up egregious PML-Q vote-buying schemes similar to those used in local nazim (mayor) races. END SUMMARY.

SURPRISE APPEARANCE

3. (C) At a scheduled meeting with NWFP Chief Minister Durrani on Peshawar's recent unrest (REFTEL), Opposition Leader and JUI-F Chief Maulana Fazlur Rahman made a surprise appearance to expound on democratic reform. He noted he is strongly supportive of greater progress towards democracy, in particular, the GOP's appointment of a permanent head of the FEC whose impartiality is respected by all political parties. However, Rahman said he cannot comply with the GOP's request for JUI-F nominations until all political parties are publicly invited to do so, preferably by a specified date. He explained that his failure to insist on the inclusion of all parties would expose him to charges he is cooperating with the GOP in return for special privileges that many believe he currently enjoys in return for his support of the 17th amendment.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION (EC)

14. (C) Rahman added he has explained his position to the EC who is willing to provide assistance to a newly invigorated FEC. Since Rahman anticipates the GOP's continuing manipulation of the FEC, he insisted the EC link any future FEC assistance to a GOP public statement respecting the FEC's independence from executive and party influence. Rahman maintained such a statement was also essential to persuade Pakistan's political parties to participate in the process of legitimating and empowering a permanent FEC head. He noted the GOP statement must explicitly include the Pakistan Army who wields "the real power" as demonstrated by its participation in the National Security Council. Rahman characterized the GOP statement as a minimal concession, burnishing the GOP's pro-democracy image.

INDIRECT SENATE ELECTIONS

15. (C) Chief Minister Durrani was skeptical that the Musharraf government is committed to genuine democratic reform. He warned that upcoming Senate elections on March 6 would prove to be a repeat of the egregious vote-buying exercise witnessed in the September 2005 nazim races, if a public vote is not substituted for the existing secret vote in provincial assemblies. Durrani noted the five PML-Q/PPP-S candidates standing for the NWFP senate seats include two (PML-Q's Ammar Ahmed Khan and PPP-S' Ghufraan Khan) who are offering up to 10 million rupees for key votes needed for their election.

16. (C) Note: On March 6, the members of each provincial assembly will elect 11 senators to the upper house of the National Assembly. In the NWFP, a successful senator-elect will need sixteen provincial assembly votes. The PML-Q/PPP-S commands only 23 votes in the NWFP assembly, making the election of more

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than one senator impossible unless assembly members cross party lines. The existing secret vote system is therefore critical to hide party cross-overs. End note.

17. (C) Durrani called on the GOP to institute a federal ordinance stipulating a public show of hands for senate elections, thereby providing for greater transparency in the election process. In addition, he claimed an open vote permits the public to better evaluate the performance of their provincial representatives. While Durrani himself stands accused of corrupt practices, he was not shy about labeling PML-Q vote-buying as egregious, perpetuating corrupt practices as senators-elect seek to recover their "vote investment."

COMMENT

18. (C) Why did these JUI-F leaders take pains to show they are willing to cooperate with the GOP, even though they do not trust President Musharraf and his party to follow through on any democratic reforms? They probably fear being fingered for obstructing a fledgling GOP reform process fostered by the West.

At the same time, the JUI-F has nothing to lose by hitching two cars (all-party inclusion and at least declared FEC independence) to the locomotive of a new FEC head. Such changes are cast as minimal and reasonable, and therefore help to counter charges that the JUI-F is insincere about reform. END

COMMENT.

SPANGLER